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Ephesians: Expand Your Horizon!

Ephesians1:1-14

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In Hebrews 12, you will find the wonderful, marvelous exhortation to 'run the race that is set before you.' Some versions translate this as 'run the race that is marked out for you.' Some add, 'run the race with perseverance.' I adore this phrase.

- **Run = get up some speed**
- **Race = this is an organized event, not something we do alone**
- **Set = the course has been set by someone else, in fact, by God**

I am not supposed to run in a different race. *This* is the race, *this* is the place for the race, *you* are the people with whom I am to run, *God* has set the course and I can trust that the race is worth the effort. I may falter or stagger, so I am encouraged to persevere, to stay with it, to stick to it, to remember it's not all about me. I find all of this very comforting.

This morning I want to briefly touch on the four themes from the first fourteen verses of this first chapter of Ephesians which, interestingly, are the themes of the entire Book of Ephesians, and in doing so, I suggest that these themes define the race that is set before us. There are other themes in the Scriptures that make the course even clearer, that show us how to train for the race, and how to work together more effectively, but Paul in these verses that we read over and over again over these weeks, seeks to give us deep theological insights into the people we are to become.

First, we are told that the purpose and highest achievement of all speech about God is the praise of God. *Theology is doxology*. If our talk about God fails to be full of praise, we miss who He is - faithful, loving, liberating, redeeming.

Second, there is a unity, a center, an origin to the many God-acts of election, creation, salvation, and revelation. God's love and the manifestation of this love have a specific location - they are found in Jesus Christ. Ephesians is Paul's loving, personal reflection on the mutual relation between Father and Son, the sacrifice of Jesus for our sake, and the role of the Holy Spirit who determines our life, our mission, our safety, and who points us to Jesus.

Third, salvation came through the Jews but now extends to both Jew and Gentile. Both those who had hope and those who had no hope, all are now given to know the very heart of God. The salvation of God once was a secret hidden, but it has now been revealed in Jesus Christ. For all creation there is no other name to whom we will bend the knee.

And fourth, because the Holy Spirit has been poured out, we already possess the kingdom of heaven. The power of the Spirit of God is available to us, today. We have access to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and empowerment, to be ambassadors for Christ here and now. We may choose not to cash the check given us. Somehow, God is self-restricting, allowing us choice to worship

and be empowered, or the choice to hold back ourselves. But the gift promised in ages past has now been given, and through the Holy Spirit, we can *become mission* in ourselves, live in God's grace, and be equipped to be people after God's own heart.

- **We praise God**

  this is our life

- **We see God most clearly in Jesus Christ**

  here is freedom & redemption

- **We see salvation extend to all people**

  not for a few; we are all of worth

- **We have the Holy Spirit within, eager to gift and empower us *to be* mission**

Our life is to run the race marked out for us. Though we all didn't remember it from our youth, we have come back to our senses, we have remembered the Person who created us and set us on the path of life. In our remembering, Paul reminds us to praise God with our entire lives. He tells us that we see God in Jesus Christ, that in Jesus we find our place, that we are of value, that we are chosen because we are loved and cherished. He explains to us that salvation came through the Jews but now is available to all who profess Christ as Lord. And he urges us to utilize the power of God made approachable by the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

Run the race set before you. Run with perseverance. Run with joy. Don't run a different race. This is the race you want to be in!

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